

# The Second Wife

BY MARY HEATON VORSE

**M**ORE poignant than the facts of life, with as much power as the elemental needs of the body, The Unseen still shapes the lives of vast peoples. In some black corners of the earth strange demons still call out for human sacrifice. Mysterious and powerful are these voiceless companions of men.

We alone, of all ages and peoples, have denied them; we have cut away our shadows from our spirits, and perhaps that is why the spirits of modern men seem unsubstantial, as a body would which could cast no dark silhouette behind it.

Around the paths of men The Unseen exists always, and it may come to any one and at any moment as it did to Beata and to Graham.

The mellow afternoon light shone through the quiet spaces of the room, which, simple as it was—bare almost, some would have said—had the supreme beauty of proportion. It had an air about it, a gracious gravity, which proclaimed it of the honorable lineage of lovingly built houses. It gave the effect of space, even of elegance, if for no other reason than that its three dimensions were in harmony.

For the first time its charm failed with Beata. Its beneficent dignity mocked at her, affecting her with the same anger that the unthinking beauty of a glorious day does to one in deep trouble. This room, her room, her creature—how dared it breathe peace while she suffered with unrest?

If there had been any reason for it she could have borne it. She had stood up with gallantry to all the blows that fate had handed out to her. No matter what had happened, her inner self had been serene and unshaken. And now, for no reason, with all the surfaces of life fair and smiling before her, a horror unspeakable, reasonless, invaded the secret places of her being.

She sat there saying to herself:

"I will not! I will not! I will not! They can't make me! They can't make me! They can't make me!"

And with the words once spoken it was as though her spirit cried out against something unknown, as though she fought for her own self and something very dear to her, and yet she didn't know what she was fighting.

The outward symbol of this struggle was so trivial, so meaningless, that she shivered at herself as though her reason was failing her. There was a bowl of yellow jonquils gleaming out of a dark corner of the room, reflecting themselves on the dark floor in a splash of color. Beata had been moved with an impulse to take these flowers and place them between the windows where the light would shine through them on a small, round table on which was inlaid a landscape in mother-of-pearl—a table that might have been hideous, but had turned out to be only a charming indiscretion of some cabinet-maker.

This whim, so harmless in its outer meaning, had come over her like an overpowering wave; yet it had come not as her own wish. It was as though it arose from the passionate desire of some will outside her own. To steady herself Beata sat down in the rosewood chair and said to herself: "I will not! I will not!" as though fighting for her own individuality.

This impulse, with its meaningless madness, had come as suddenly, as shatteringly, as some explosion. Dread shook her through and through—a dread that left her tense and expectant. Why, she hadn't felt that way for three years, not since she had waited for one of Alène's terrible, meaningless, heart-rending scenes—scenes that Graham and she knew were caused by Alène's illness, and yet scenes that gave the effect of wantonness, as if Alène wanted to make them suffer, too. Since her nerves were dis-

eased, since her soul was poisoned in God knows what mysterious fashion, she couldn't let them off—the two creatures dearest to her—but must encompass them also in the hell where she lived.

In spite of Beata's care and Graham's devotion, Alène had got worse and worse, until it seemed to them that madness stared from her eyes. She had died from an overdose of her sleeping-potion—an accidental death, the doctor had insisted.

This had been three years ago. After Alène's death, Graham had gone abroad, and for a year Beata hadn't seen him. Just when, after his return, she had begun to care for him, she couldn't now tell. They had drifted into it—gone in step by step. She couldn't even remember when he had asked her to marry him, so well had they understood.

She had been married six months now, and until this moment she had been happier than she had ever been in her life—happier than she had known it was possible to be. The eighteen months that she had spent nursing Alène, and the final catastrophe, had left her stunned, asking of life only quiet. She had had peace and rest and then happiness, and now it was broken—for no reason; broken—for so absurd a thing.

It was especially hard for Beata to bear; she didn't know how to meet moods—she had never had any. It was almost her first experience with any unhappiness from within, her first experience of that overwhelming misery that comes unreasoning from the inner recesses of the spirit, something more full of anguish than pain, something that makes grief seem God's compassion, and sorrow as sweet as a gray day in midsummer.

She sought for some cause of such disturbance, her trained mind running rapidly through the events of the last few days as an expert might riffle a deck of cards. There was no explanatory spot or fleck on the fair surface of the kindly and familiar events.

"I must be sick," she thought, and again sought for some symptom that might satisfy her. There was nothing. It was as ghostly to have her spirit so disturbed as for doors to slam and windows rattle when the trees remain quiet without. And while her heart beat and while the tortured nerves of her cried

out the more torturingly that she did not know the source of her pain, her tranquil head thought, "I must treat this mood as I used to Alène's."

At this thought her heart stood still—then leaped like a frightened animal in fear for its very life, and as though in actual physical terror of some unseen menace she fled toward the sunshine of the garden, glancing apprehensively behind her, not for fear of what she might see, but from a feeling as inexplicable as all the rest, that she wished no one to see her go. Not the servants, not Graham—especially not Graham. She heard his voice call to her:

"Beata—dear Beata!" So happy it was, so reassuring, that suddenly her fear vanished as though it had wakened her from torturing nightmare. She felt her actual body coming back to life as one breathes easily for the first time again after one has been overwhelmed by a crashing wave. Her heart beat freely again; the intolerable racking of her spirit passed by; color returned to her cheeks. Only as she saw Graham coming toward her through the open door she repressed an impulse to throw herself about his neck as though he had really delivered her from herself.

That evening the idea of telling Graham flitted through her mind, coming and going like a shadow cast by a flickering flame. In the end she decided not to, and, as she did, a sadness fell over her spirit, while her mind argued:

Poor Graham—why should I tell him anything so vague, and at the same time so fantastic? Hasn't he had enough of the inexplicable in his life?

Then, at this thought of Alène, it seemed as if Alène was there. Beata had all the sensation of seeing her without the actual visualization—Alène, sitting, her dark-rimmed eyes on Graham. She watched them fill slowly with tears; watched Alène's face quiver like that of a hurt child that asks, "Oh, why do you so wound me?" Beata had sat there often enough through what seemed a long lifetime of vicarious pain, pretending not to notice Graham's irrepressible discomfort; pretending not to notice Alène's gathering nerve-storm which sometimes threatened and threatened, poisoning their lives, poisoning the very air;

sometimes passing over, leaving sunlight behind.

Recalling these things, Beata let her eyes rest on vacancy. What prevented one, she wondered, from seeing with one's actual eyes any one whom one could see with what is called "the mind's eye"? There have always been people, sick and well, who could project their inner visions into space and thus behold their own imaginings and realities. Beata dwelt in this way on the image of Alène, absorbed as a devotee is absorbed in the contemplation of the attributes of Deity. After a time it was as though her visualization of Alène had been projected into space, and that this thought of her was there clothed in form and invisible, but existing somehow in another medium. She wondered if it were true that the things seen by dreamers have their real existence in some fluid which we may not perceive.

Here Graham's voice broke in upon her, asking:

"What are you thinking of, Beata, so intensely?"

She had been plunged so profoundly in her train of thought, the crystal mirror of her reflection had been shattered so unexpectedly, that she jumped nervously. It seemed as if her spirit had come swimming up from some far depth in which it had plunged itself. She realized, too, that she had been looking directly at Graham, but through him and beyond him, as if she had penetrated far enough into this land which she had so fantastically imagined, so that the things of this world had become for the moment non-existent, as are usually the things we cannot see. For a moment her mind and eyes and all of her had dwelt in some almost luminous vacancy which had been cleared of so-called actuality for a new creation of her own. Her return to the physical world, to Graham, and to familiar things in the room was a shock as of physical pain.

She had been awakened too abruptly. She looked at him, dazed, frowning, at the same time registering the troubled and anxious look on his face—a look of doubt, a look of wonder, a look of some deeper trouble also. In answer to his question came unbidden the words:

"Why do you look at me like that, Graham?"

He arose and put his arms around her, but before he spoke he swallowed, as though speech came to him with an effort. With his arms around her, his face close to hers, something snapped in Beata's mind, like a joint coming back into place. She had yet the impression of having been away a very great distance.

"What were you thinking of just now?" he repeated.

She answered with absolute truthfulness:

"I don't know—I almost seemed to be hypnotized." The shock of his voice had for the second obliterated the object of her deep absorption.

Graham shook her roughly.

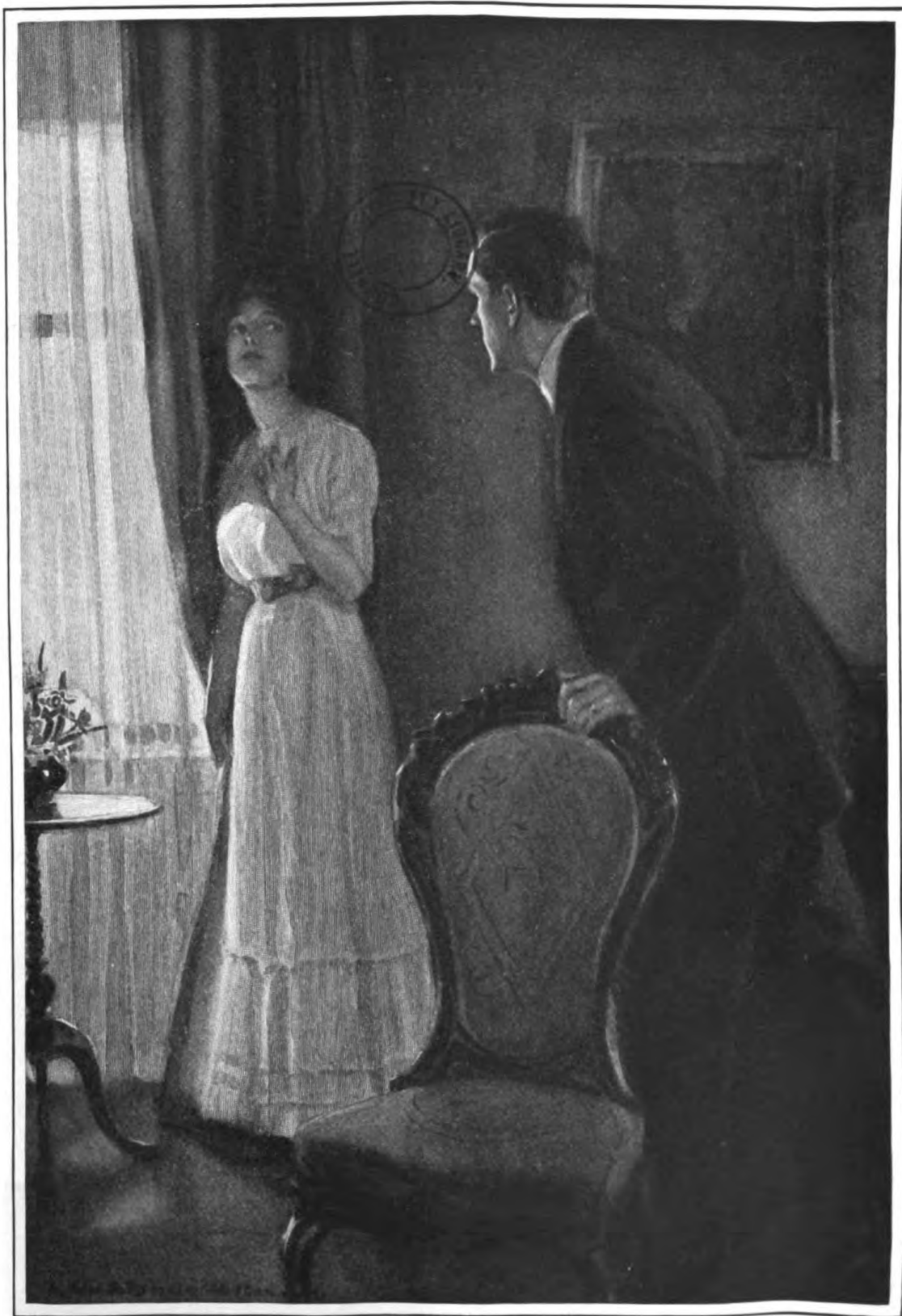
"Well, don't do it again, please," he said. "I don't like your looks."

"What do I look like?" She was perfectly natural now; the whole phantasmagoria had vanished out of her spirit as though it had not been.

"I don't like your looks," he repeated—"that's all." He had the evasive and uneasy air of a man who doesn't like to tell what is in his mind.

The following day Beata succeeded in overcoming the feeling of distrust with the whole universe which the inexplicable breeds in a direct and common-sense temperament. She overcame herself, yet she didn't go into the drawing-room, and the drawing-room was as much lived in by her as was Graham's library by him; for the effect of that terrible and spectral battle remained with her as though some shadow had been cast across her spirit. Pushed into the farthest recesses of her mind was the question, "Why? Why? Why?" Nor could she rid herself of the idea that there was more to come, nor of a nameless and reasonless fear that in some strange way she had given up some of her personality.

With the passing of the days the shadow dwindled, until one day Beata went again into her room. Yellow flowers picked freshly stood in a bowl upon her secretary. At the sight of them there, hot anger surged up within her, making her tingle from head to foot. Swiftly and yet with a certain furtiveness, as though she were being watched, she picked them up and carried them back to their place in the window and



*Drawn by John A. Williams.*

Half-tone plate engraved by C. E. Hart.

"WHAT WERE YOU DOING IN THE WINDOW?" HE INSISTED.



placed them on the little inlaid table between the windows where the light would shine through them. As she did so there came over her a very agony of desire to see Graham; she wanted him to come home; she wondered where he was and with whom. An impatience to go out and find him wherever he was plucked at her feet. She looked at her watch; it was almost time for his return to luncheon, and she posted herself at the window before which the flowers stood and which commanded a view of the elm-shaded street to wait for him. As she stood there in a fever of impatience and longing and affection, she felt as though her whole personality had been invaded by an emotion foreign to her own temperament. Her love had been from the first deep and profound, the surface of it radiant, but without anguish of spirit. They knew each other too well for uncertainties or surprises—they had been friends so long before they had become lovers.

The knowledge that he would soon come, that he would come when he said he would, had been enough for her; why this impatience, she wondered—where did it come from, this passionate agony of longing for the sight of his face? She stood there peering out from the window. She was so sure he must come down that road, her gaze so lost in the distance for the first glimpse of him, that she did not hear his step behind her. His words, in a tone through which a sharp anxiety pierced, "Beata, what are you doing there?" made her turn upon him, her nervous hand clutching the heavy, old-gold drapery of the curtain.

For a moment they stood gazing at each other, startled. Then she laughed with attempted lightness:

"What's the matter, Graham? You look frightened!"

"What were you doing in the window?" he insisted.

"Why—just waiting for you."

"Come—let's get out of here. If you wait staring like that—Waiting for me! Good God! One would have thought that you expected me to be brought home on a stretcher! You'll be getting yourself hypnotized again, Beata, before you know it." He put his arm around her and drew her out on the piazza. "I've

just got a letter from mother," he told her. "She's coming back."

"Oh, I *am* glad," Beata cried.

For some time during her son's first marriage Mrs. Yates had made her home with the young people, and then, under the pressure of Alène's nervous disorder and her final illness, she had left their home to live with her sister. The pressure was too much for her gentle spirit; she couldn't weather the storms which swept and devastated the household; she suffered, too, with a keen inner shame that she hadn't strength enough to help this tormented daughter of hers, whose peculiar loveliness and charm she had so cared for before illness blighted it. After Graham's second marriage she had again made his house her headquarters, finding in Beata's tranquillity something more akin to her own nature, something nearer to what her own daughter might have been than Alène's more fascinating personality had ever been able to give her.

To Beata's heartfelt "Oh, I'm glad!" Graham echoed:

"You can believe I am."

There was an unmistakable passion of relief in his tone, as if Beata's cry had voiced the hope of deliverance—as if the presence of this beloved older woman would dispel the shadow that was drifting in upon them, shutting out the sun from their lives. It was their first recognition of the nameless fear that had come over them.

Now Beata was sure that never for a moment had Graham failed to recognize this awful something which was crawling upon them like some dark spiritual tide. If only he would help her—if he would ask her what was the matter! She felt his anxious look resting on her; then he made some excuse and left her. It was as though he had deserted her in a moment of great peril. Scorn for his cowardice and for his stupidity flashed over her; then a darkness settled over her spirit. Perhaps she was going mad; perhaps her nerves were only shaken—this was what her intelligence kept telling her with irritating, ineffectual persistency, while her heart cried out that the very springs of life in her had been poisoned, the very depths of her personality shaken.

At any rate, she was adrift in a strange and unfamiliar world, and there was no one anywhere to help her. A great pity for the stricken soul of Alène poured over her. Alène had put out her hands and had pleaded to be saved from herself—and no one had helped her. Now, at the first touch of her own distress, Graham turned from her—Graham wasn't going to help her. This thought walked through her mind: "Both of us together, we could have fought it! Alone—I cannot!"

She heard the gate click and saw Graham walking down the street. No doubt he was going to meet his mother—going without her.

"He's running away from me," she thought.

They had always gone to meet Mrs. Yates together. How many times they had walked down this street side by side, long before Alène died, whenever Graham's mother came! They would go down and tell her the news and how Alène was at that moment. Now she was left behind while Graham walked down alone to the station to see his mother first; to warn her, no doubt, that Beata was "not quite well."

She went into the house and began shoving around the ornaments, rearranging them with a sort of bitter satisfaction, an inward glow quite out of keeping with her trivial occupation. The noise of carriage wheels checked her suddenly. She stopped, a little dazed, like a person who has forgotten what he came into a room for—as an actor searches for a cue.

Now she remembered—Graham's mother was coming, and she must run out to meet her.

For the next few days the house was as though bathed in sunshine; calm returned to it. Beata was continually with the older woman, sheltering herself in her loving presence. It was as though all around was some fog which concealed menacing and terrible shapes—some terror that walked in the darkness, but for the moment Beata could escape from it, though she felt as insecure as if she were living in a soap-bubble; in a moment the force of the invading shadows—or whatever they were—might come upon her, and the agony of her rent personality would begin again.

They were all touchingly happy—Beata as from a relief from pain, Graham in his recovered peace—until one day when the two women sat sewing in the drawing-room. Graham was lounging near them, reading. Then Mrs. Yates raised her head toward the window and said:

"There's something different about this room since I've been away. You haven't moved things, have you?"

Beata didn't answer; her spirit, it seemed, ceased to breathe. The same shock that she had felt communicated itself to Graham, and he arose and walked around restlessly.

"I don't quite make out what's changed," she pursued, with serenity. "I see you keep yellow flowers in the window the way poor Alène did— Why, Beata, what ails you, child?"

For Beata had let her sewing fall and was gazing at Graham's mother in fascinated horror. Never once to herself had she clothed her thoughts in any words. At her fixed look and hopeless gesture Mrs. Yates stared, and for a moment the two women looked one at the other, horror in the eyes of each. Mrs. Yates broke the silence with:

"Are you ill, Beata—what is it?"

"I'm faint—a sudden pain—" The words came without her volition; her hand sought her heart.

There was a second of taut silence, when the very air of the room seemed to share the suspense, while mother and son looked at each other. Then Beata arose.

"I'm better now—I'm going to lie down."

For several days she remained on a couch in Graham's library on a pretext of illness, hiding from life by her inactivity; trying by her very quietness to put off the next move in the drama, which came like an unexpected verdict of a physician, when Mrs. Yates announced, after the mail had come one day:

"Ella wants me to visit her; I think I shall go."

"When does she want you?" Beata inquired.

With that command of herself which guileless older women know so well how to use, Mrs. Yates answered in an irreproachably natural tone:

"Why, right away. I shall go to—"

morrow, my dear—if you are feeling better, Beata.”

“Oh yes,” she replied. “I’m perfectly well now, I think. I’ve just been a little run down for some reason.”

“It’s very natural with this heat,” Mrs. Yates replied, tranquilly. There was not a break in her surface anywhere.

After her departure—they both took her to the train—Beata and Graham turned into the garden. Suddenly she stopped.

“Why did mother go?” she asked him.

“Why, to see Ella, of course,” Graham replied.

“You know what I mean—what was her real reason?”

Oh, how she waited for his answer—how she prayed for it in his one little second of indecision!

“You’ve had a lot of odd little streaks lately, Beata,” he said.

Beata wanted to cry aloud to him: “You know she won’t come back—you know I’ve driven her away!” But she couldn’t speak. She waited for him to help her; she was sure that if she could drag the obscure events out into the light of day and clothe them with commonplace speech it would kill their horror. But what to say—where to begin? Her heart cried out, “Now—now!” Her whole being urged her into her vague confession, while her obstinate common sense leagued itself with the shadowy impulse from without which placed itself in the way of her desire.

Again Beata fought the unknown force as of an awful voiceless conflict of wills; common sense, by paradox, fighting on the side of The Unseen. Only now Beata knew she was fighting for her very existence. She no longer struggled with something that was no more than some strange and shattering nervous attack. Herself—her own personality—was her battle. Some mysterious door had been opened that allowed to flow through it emotions and acts not her own. She guessed that the very gestures of her hands, the look of her eyes, had been used. She had seen it mirrored on Graham’s face; she had seen it in the momentary leaping horror of his glance.

But while their troubled eyes looked into each other’s with comprehension, their obstinate tongues refused to voice

their fear of this lurking peril. Peril was what it was, and Beata knew it—peril of their happiness—peril of her own sanity.

She looked at him, tears swimming in her eyes; longing to throw herself on his beloved heart and to lie there as in a safe haven and to beg him to save her, or at least to give her relief from pain. But he was gazing at her speculatively; to her racked mind it seemed that his gaze was hostile. She turned and fled to her room to give herself up for the first time in her life to the sort of weeping that made her feel that she had wept forth all the strength of her body; that with her weeping some virtue had gone out of her. She said out loud:

“There is no use fighting any more.” A melancholy sense of rest enveloped her. No one would help her, and she wouldn’t fight any more. She relaxed the muscles of her spirit. Now let the flood overwhelm her if it would; let it drown her utterly—she didn’t care.

As the last shred of her resistance died, the enveloping shadow receded. She had expected some sort of a cataclysm. She had been fighting The Unseen, whatever it was—madness, visions—with all her strength; opposing her puny might to its force. At times, it seemed to her, coming near victory—with Graham’s help, almost sure victory. But now it stood aloof.

Days passed and nothing happened. The outer surfaces of life were serene, and yet—all of life was altered, and Beata must go through her miserable treadmill of thought. She would sit long hours staring into vacancy, thinking over the minutest details of the events of the day. She dwelt on each small, meaningless act, half of whose torment lay in its very insignificance; the fact that there was nothing to tell, that you couldn’t touch or taste or explain, not to anybody, not even to yourself, without seeming to talk in terms of madness. Such things, she would say to herself, didn’t happen. And yet, while nothing happened, from one day to another there was a steady onflow of small details—whatever it was, this nameless and faceless thing was crawling upon her, Beata realized, like some dark tide, unceasing, unrelenting; while she slept, while she walked; without let-up, without rest.



Oh, that something would happen to hasten it! Oh, that some tangible event would happen so that she could cry out: "I've seen! I know!"

The only thing to be seen with the eyes was that the house, her creature, was changing in aspect under her hand. Her own hand eagerly obliterated the changes she had made when she had become Graham's wife. Yet the changes came with terrible and relentless slowness. One day a shade pulled down, a window shut, a picture of her choosing suppressed, the order of some books changed—nothing more, but each change accomplished by her hand and with a sense of fierce, inner joy.

She would walk up and down, up and down, absorbed in her own emotions, unconscious of the flight of time, and obscurely conscious that time dragged, that time stood still, that the hours whirled around her unnoticed, and that she and her sick fear alone stood still in the swirling, shifting universe.

Sometimes she would fill hours with balancing up which she would prefer—this nameless horror, this thing that couldn't be, that was poisoning her, perhaps killing her—or madness. She would laugh long, silent laughter on the irony of fate that put such a choice before her, of all people—she, who had been praised always for her sanity; she, to whom Alène had turned in her first illness of the spirit as a friend.

Meantime her life with Graham went on with unbroken surface—so unbroken that she could have screamed at him. Yet she knew with a sickening certainty that he watched her covertly, from around some doors, as it were; that he was always pretending to be doing something else, and yet was watching her. He, too, with smiling face and frozen heart was living in an obscure hell, spying upon her, watching for a look of the eye, for a gesture of the hand, while he had let the whole change in the house pass by unnoticed.

Anyway, if he watched her, then she watched him, for ever growing in her was a curious distrust of him—distrust of what she couldn't tell; she didn't trust him, that was all. Her logical mind that rejected the whole situation had to go through its torment and had to ask

questions of her tormented heart. Did she distrust his love? There was no reason for it, and yet he never left the house but suspicion, nameless and groundless, filled her whole being with an ever-increasing anguish.

She suffered when he was with her; suffered from the suspicion of his suspicion—that he must read into her heart and hate and despise her for her ever-growing distrust—a distrust that didn't even seek to pin itself to anything. If she could only have accused him of something; if only for one little moment there was some real complaint against him. She herself would cry, even if she watched, even if she peered from behind a closed blind at him:

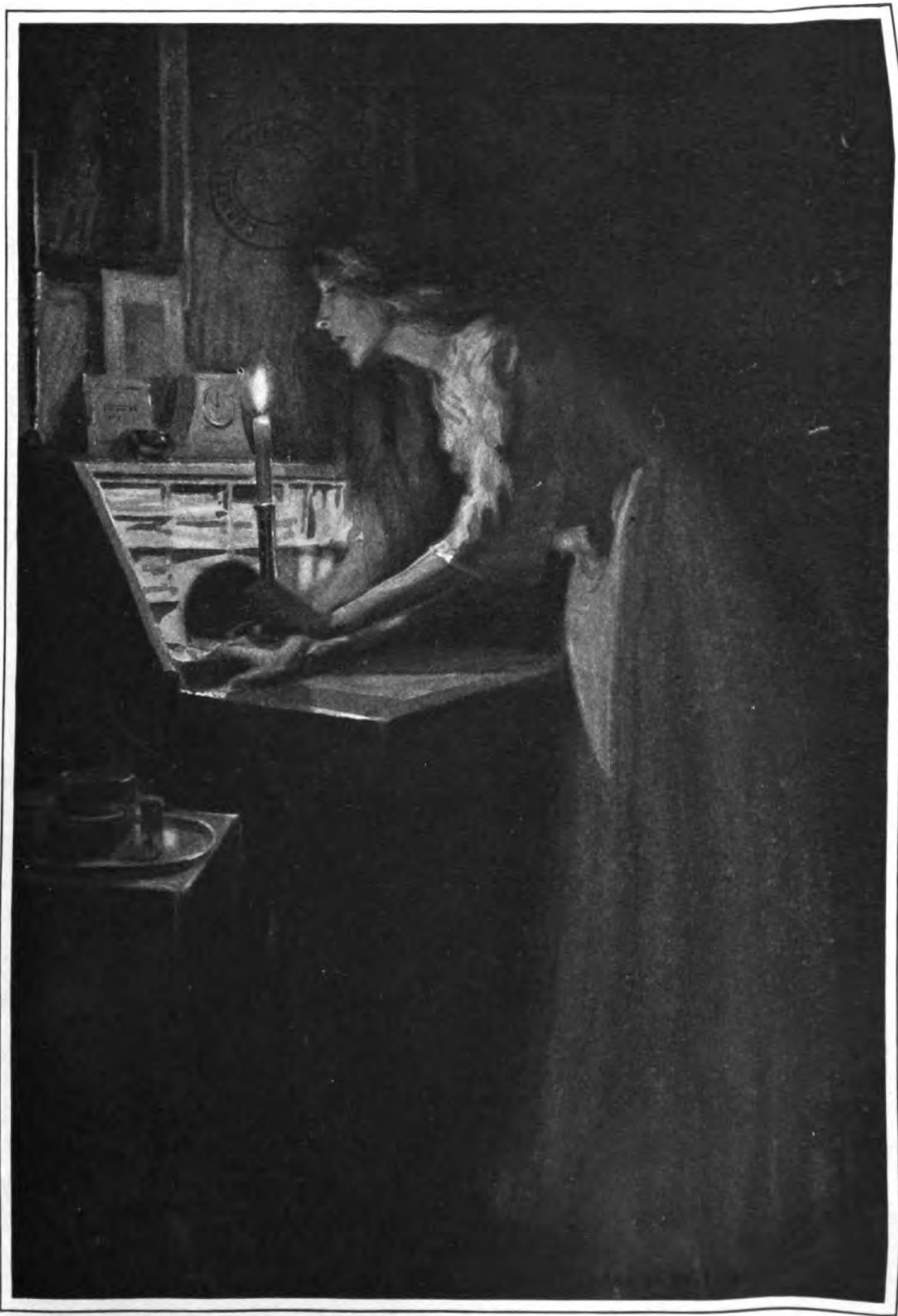
"Oh, my dear, I know you are good and true! It isn't *I* watching you—it isn't *I* accusing you—and yet I must suffer as though I knew you were waiting, a knife in your hand, to stab me when my back is turned!"

Beata waited as loving women wait who know that their hour is come when the beloved is gone from them, and, worse than that—that he lies. They must wait with loving and beating hearts for the death of their spirits to be dealt out to them, shamefully and cowardly. And since they cannot believe their lovers cowards as well as traitors, they still believe in the face of unbelief.

This was Beata's torment: believing him upright, believing him true, she must suffer for an unbelief; knowing that he loved her alone, she must watch each mood as it passed by for corroboration of what she knew was not. She must watch all his comings and goings; she must read dislike and suspicion in his gaze—the dislike that a man has for a woman whose claims sever him from the beloved. Then, as to thousands of women before her, came the need of knowing. Certainty! Certainty was what she wanted; for good or bad, to know the torment in which she lived.

"Oh," she would think to herself, "if I could only know!" But her mind would answer, "Know what?"

She lived continually as though on the eve of some discovery. A little further, and she would know what the monstrous certainty was of which she wished to be sure. If she looked into the black pool



*Drawn by John A. Williams.*

HER LETTERS WERE WHAT SHE HAD COME TO FIND.



of her uncertainty long enough, she felt the answer would come; there must be an answer to all this that she suffered, and somehow she felt it lay in Graham—somehow in Graham she must find it. His very dumbness was to her the corroboration of his blameless guilt. She hated his smiling face; she hated his pretense; she wanted with all her strength to cry out:

“Say what you think! Say what you suspect!”

Then one night, as she sat in his room, and while their lips talked the pleasant commonplaces of happily married people, she realized that the answer to the riddle lay in his desk.

She knew it was there. There, in tangible form was the answer of all her torment and all her suspicion, if she could only look. She waited frozen in her own impatience for the slow moments to drag past on their leaden feet; she sat waiting until Graham should go upstairs and go to sleep beside her, so she could come down and find out what lay there.

There was no fight now. She, Beata—Beata with honor like a man’s honor—waited with beating heart, her breath coming short, for the evening to pass and for Graham to sleep, that she might commit the one unforgivable crime.

He slept at last. Beata got out of bed, put on her dressing-gown and slippers, and went noiselessly down the stairs. She made no sound; not a stair creaked. It was as though she went through each one of the little acts like some highly trained mechanism, as though all her life had been one rehearsal for this moment. It was as though she had been rehearsing all her life for this—that without noise she might get up, dress herself, go down-stairs without noise and light her candle in the library, then walk swiftly and with the directness of a homing pigeon to Graham’s desk—to Graham’s desk, where the answer of everything lay.

In the strange and painful universe in which Beata had been living the only certainty that she had was that there was the answer, the explanation of the riddle, and that she was about to find it. That she must find it even at the price of her own honor, at the breaking-down

of the things most essential in her nature, meant nothing.

She went unfalteringly to where the desk stood, with the candle in her hand; unfalteringly she pulled out a little drawer and took from it a bundle of letters. They were tied neatly—Graham was exact and methodical in all his ways. As she opened them a little picture fluttered down—a snapshot of herself sent to Graham long ago, and then she recognized in the letters her own handwriting—nothing else. Her letters were what she had come to find—her letters written to Graham long ago! Written during his brief absences from Alène, telling of Alène’s change from day to day; written to him when she was away. Letters for all the world to read; letters without one word of affection beyond that of a kindly friendship.

Her own letters—that was the answer! Her friendship and Graham’s—that was the key-note of this mystery! For a second she stood there, not willing to understand. Then came crowding on her memories of Alène’s looks and her sudden appearances in the room where she and Graham sat talking innocently—so innocently that no thought of what Alène meant had crossed their minds. So Beata stood motionless, her own letters in her hand, a terrible figure, as though she held there a proof of her own blood-guilt. And the question now arose to her mind:

“When did we first begin to care for each other? And was I here for Alène, or was I here for Graham’s sake?”

She had come for Alène, but she had stayed for Graham, and before Alène’s tragic death she had been the only comfort that he had had.

Then she heard his step behind her, and then his voice, and instead of her own name—“Alène!” he called. And then with a face of horror and her hands outstretched in a gesture terrible and tragic, a gesture they knew well and that was not her own, she cried:

“Yes—Alène, if you like! Why did you keep these letters—you, who never keep any letters?”

He tried to recover himself.

“Are you mad, Beata?” he said, but the sternness of his voice faltered.

“Oh,” she took up, “I wish I were—

you could shut me up then! Madness would be easy! We killed her—you and I between us killed her! She trusted us and we killed her—she trusted us and we tortured her!”

“Hush!” said Graham. “You don’t know what you’re saying, Beata. You’re not well—you’ve not been well for a long time.”

“No,” she agreed. “I’ve not been well—but you’ve said nothing about it, Graham. It’s a very strange illness I’ve had—what’s been its name, Graham? What doctors cure it? You’ve tried not to believe—what couldn’t be believed. Such things *can’t* happen—that’s what you’ve said to yourself when my face has frightened you—when you came into the room and thought Alène was standing here. But how should I have come where I am now, to find my own letters—my letters that you kept—my letters that I’ve been waiting so long to find?”

“Listen, Beata—we’ll go away. You’re ill. We’ll go away!”

She saw that he couldn’t admit what he had seen. In his man’s world such things couldn’t be. But it made no difference to her now. She held her proof in her hand.

“We’ll go away and forget these weeks,” he repeated.

“We’ll do what you like—it won’t alter anything. *We know now*,” Beata answered, dully; for she knew, as Graham did, that there was no flight possible for them, no refuge that they could take anywhere in the world, apart or together. They had heard the voice from the other side of silence; there was no country where they could take refuge, no place to go that would blot out from Graham’s memory the picture of Beata leaning over his desk, her letters in her hand.

## “When First I Wore the Sword of Love”

BY LOUISE MORGAN SILL

### I

WHEN first I wore the sword of Love  
Red courage sprang into my heart,  
Through all my veins the swift blood ran  
Rich fountains of new life to start.

A din of fighting filled my ear,  
And one long call on bugles rang.  
Then from my being fled all fear,  
And a strong soul within me sang.

### II

#### THE SHIELD

This timid tilt of life I fear not,  
I who have all eternity;  
Whispering caution now I hear not,  
Forward marches the heart of me.

The world is mine for my best endeavor,  
Labor and beauty, toil and art:  
For safety guards the one forever  
Who wears Love’s shield upon his heart.